The Growing Demand for Healthcare Workers in Virginia

The United States has faced shortages of healthcare workers for years; a challenge that was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2018, even before the pandemic, there were 27 open healthcare practitioner jobs — such as doctors, surgeons, and registered nurses — for every available unemployed healthcare practitioner across the country.1 And the situation in Virginia is no exception.2 Despite the many barriers that internationally trained healthcare workers face to practicing medicine in the state, immigrants routinely punch above their weight in the field.3 In 2019, they made up 14.5 percent of the state’s healthcare workers4 — including 28.9 percent of all physicians and surgeons5 — while making up 12.8 percent of the population.6

For Virginia to remain competitive and address critical shortages of physicians and other healthcare workers, it will be crucial to implement policies that not only attract and retain global talent that is complementary to the U.S.-born workforce, but that also build career pathways for immigrants who already call the state home.

One way to achieve this goal is to join states like Minnesota and Washington in reducing barriers for international medical graduates (IMGs) and other internationally trained healthcare workers.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, labor shortages, and a growing number of baby boomers who are reaching retirement age, Virginia has seen an increase in demand for healthcare workers.

From 2017 to 2021, there were 570,288 unique healthcare worker job postings in Virginia,7 an increase of

+15.9%

During the same time, the median advertised wages also rose from $32.68 to $37.35 per hour,8 or

+$4.67/hr

From 2017 to 2021, the top five in-demand healthcare jobs in Virginia were:9

1. Registered Nurses
2. Medical Records Specialists
3. Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses
4. Physical Therapists
5. Physicians

During the same period, the top Virginia employers hiring healthcare workers were:10

1. Anthem Blue Cross
2. HCA Healthcare
3. Sentara Healthcare
4. Inova Health System
5. Bon Secours
### Online Job Postings for Healthcare Workers, 2017 – 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Change 2017-2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dental Hygienists</td>
<td>+630.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opticians, Dispensing</td>
<td>+318.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>+181.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optometrists</td>
<td>+91.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric Technicians</td>
<td>+89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Medical Sonographers</td>
<td>+64.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnetic Resonance Imaging Technologists</td>
<td>+60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses</td>
<td>+53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nurses</td>
<td>+1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The average share of healthcare workers from 2015 to 2019 who were immigrants: 12

- **27.2%** Dentists
- **24.9%** Diagnostic Medical Sonographers
- **16.8%** Optometrists
- **15.2%** Psychiatric Technicians
- **14.7%** Dental Hygienists
- **13.4%** Registered Nurses
- **11.3%** Opticians, Dispensing
- **10.6%** Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses

As employers struggle to recruit and retain specialized healthcare workers, immigrants play a crucial role in helping to address labor shortages. With an increase in demand for multilingual and culturally competent employees, internationally trained healthcare professionals are uniquely positioned to provide support across all healthcare settings.

From 2017 to 2021, the number of healthcare job postings that required bilingual skills in Virginia increased by 13

**+38.8%**

**HEALTHCARE JOB POSTINGS BY RURAL-URBAN CLASSIFICATION** 14

The number of job postings between 2017 and 2021 by Virginia County Classification:

- For small/medium metro counties 15 the number of postings decreased by **-17.2%**
- For rural counties 16 the number of postings decreased by **-18.9%**
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PHYSICIANS

In 2015, long before the COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia faced severe physician shortages, with some counties across the state registering zero physicians per 100,000 residents. Projections remain dire. Virginia is expected to need an additional 1,622 primary care physicians by 2030, significantly impacting the accessibility of healthcare, particularly in rural communities.

ONLINE JOB POSTINGS FOR PHYSICIANS, 2017 – 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>2017-2021 Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons</td>
<td>+244.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podiatrists</td>
<td>+118.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstetricians and Gynecologists</td>
<td>+107.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Internal Medicine Physicians</td>
<td>+79.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anesthesiologists</td>
<td>+37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgeons, Except Ophthalmologists</td>
<td>+34.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average share of workers from 2015 to 2019 who were immigrants:

- **28.9%** Physicians
- **30.8%** Surgeons
BRAIN WASTE IN VIRGINIA

Although there is a growing need for healthcare workers in Virginia, many immigrants who have received specialized education, training, and licensing abroad are unable to practice in the state, facing challenges such as recredentialing and language proficiency. Their skillsets are all too often underutilized — in what is known as “brain waste” — which frequently leads to under- or unemployment.21

In 2021, across Virginia:22

Share of residents who had a biology or healthcare-related bachelor’s degree but worked in an occupation that did not require a bachelor’s:

- 28.1% of immigrants with professional and doctorate degrees23 worked in occupations in the healthcare industry that did not require a medical doctorate or professional degree.

Addressing the barriers that prevent additional qualified, internationally trained healthcare workers from practicing in Virginia will be vital to helping the state meet its growing healthcare needs.
ENDNOTES


2. Unless stated otherwise, all data in this report is reflective of Virginia.

3. We define an immigrant as anyone born outside the country to non-U.S. citizen parents who is a resident in the United States. This includes naturalized citizens, green card holders, temporary visa holders, refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants, among others.


5. Ibid.


8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


14. Using the 2013 NCHS Urban–Rural Classification Scheme for Counties, Virginia counties were grouped into two different population groups: medium and small metropolitan, and rural counties. NCHS medium and small metropolitan counties were combined for the middle classification. Rural countries were identified using the micropolitan and non-core NCHS classifications.


23. Doctorate degrees include the fields of Biology and Life Sciences, Nuclear, Industrial Radiology and Biological Technologies, and Medical and Health Sciences and Services.